Studying a heterogeneous array of target groups can help us understand prejudice

Brandt, M.J.; Crawford, J.T.

Published in:
Current Directions in Psychological Science

DOI:
10.1177/0963721419830382

Publication date:
2019

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Studying a heterogeneous array of target groups can help us understand prejudice

Mark J. Brandt

Tilburg University

Jarret T. Crawford

The College of New Jersey

Word count: 2435/2500 (abstract and all text, not references), 40/40 references

Correspondence can be addressed to Mark Brandt at m.j.brandt@tilburguniversity.edu and Jarret Crawford at crawford@tcnj.edu.

Funding Statement

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 759320).

This manuscript is in press at *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, but it has not undergone any of the normal proofing routine. Please cite, but be careful with direct quotes which might change in the proofing process.

Abstract (142/100-200 words)

Prejudice can be expressed towards a wide array of target groups, but it is often operationalized as expressed towards a narrower array of groups. By studying a heterogeneous array of target groups we can draw broader conclusions about prejudice writ large. We describe our research which seeks to understand constructs that consistently predict prejudice across a wide array of groups (consistent predictors), as well as those constructs that only predict prejudice for some types of groups (inconsistent predictors). For inconsistent predictors, we can also identify the perceived characteristics of the target groups (e.g., status, ideology) that are associated with expressed prejudice. Studying a heterogenous array of target groups opens up new questions related to morality, cognitive processing, and perceived discrimination, but also suggests that prejudice, depending on the group, can be a motivating force preserving the status quo or prompting social change.

Studying a heterogeneous array of target groups can help us understand prejudice

We use research on individual differences (e.g., political ideology, personality) and prejudice to illustrate how scholars can advance the study of prejudice and discrimination by studying a heterogeneous array of target groups. First, it can help identify constructs that consistently predict prejudice across a wide array of groups (consistent predictors). Second, it can help identify constructs that only predict prejudice for some types of groups (inconsistent predictors). Third, for inconsistent predictors of prejudice, it can help identify the perceived characteristics of the target groups (e.g., status, ideology) that are associated with expressed prejudice.

The Typical Prejudice Assessment Strategy

The typical strategy in prejudice research is to measure or manipulate a particular construct, whether that is resource scarcity (Krosch, Tyler, & Amodio, 2017), violent video games (Greitemeyer, 2014), or impending doom (Quirin, Bode, Luckey, Pyszczynski, & Kuhl, 2014), and measure prejudice towards a particular group. This strategy has led to a number of findings: people express more prejudice when resources are scarce than abundant, after playing Call of Duty 2 (a war game) compared to Flipper (a pinball game), and when doom is impending than when not. Research examining generalized prejudice – the personality trait whereby people express more prejudice towards a variety of groups – uses more target groups (e.g., McFarland, 2010), yet these groups share a key feature: they are typically disadvantaged (Bergh, Akrami, Sidanius, & Sibley, 2016). When studying prejudice, researchers often limit themselves to studying just a few different target groups, and just a few different *types* of target groups.

Is This a Problem?

This is a problem. Prejudice can be expressed towards a large variety of target groups. Social psychologists define prejudice as a negative evaluation of a group or an individual based on group membership (e.g., Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). This definition is not limited to specific subcategories of groups and applies to any possible group (e.g., African-Americans, but also nerds). Although prejudice towards vulnerable groups may be the most consequential and vile (in our opinion), it is not the totality of prejudice. This well-accepted definition of prejudice focuses us on the core psychological issue: negative evaluations of a group.

If prejudice can be expressed towards *any* group, then research that focuses on a limited range of groups may provide misleading conclusions about prejudice. A hypothetical experiment might claim the threat of social upheaval increases prejudice, but only measure prejudice towards Arab Muslims. The finding may be preregistered, replicable, and robust according to all of the new norms of solid science (Munafò et al., 2017), but it cannot tell us about prejudice broadly. The same threat might decrease prejudice towards Whites, rich people, and people in the military, and *not* affect prejudice towards Latinx or Filipino Americans. It is also possible that the threat does not increase prejudice towards Arab Muslims as predicted, but does increase prejudice towards African Americans and gay men. If we instead include measures of prejudice towards a range of target groups, we can know if the effect generalizes to other groups (increased prejudice), does not generalize to other groups (null effects), changes directions entirely (decreased prejudice), or only emerges with other groups (only increased prejudice for other groups). To make conclusions about the nature of prejudice broadly, beyond prejudice towards [*insert specific group here*], researchers need to study prejudice as it is expressed towards a large number of groups.

The Solution

There are options for increasing the heterogeneity of groups. We could study prejudice towards *all possible* social groups, from cheerleaders, rich people, and funeral home directors to African-Americans, transgender people, and homeless people. The obvious challenge is that the number of social groups may approach infinity. A more manageable option is to include the range of target groups that the researchers hope will capture the necessary contours of the effects; those groups that are likely to show the hypothesized effect, as well as those that might be less likely to show the effect (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2014; Wetherell, Brandt & Reyna, 2013). This can work, but it is easy to miss groups that may be relevant to individual participants. To address these shortcomings, we can use stimuli (target groups) *representative* of the population of interest (e.g., social groups in America; social groups at my university) and model these stimuli as random factors (Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012). This ensures that results are not due to the particular characteristics of the groups included. And it ensures that we capture the psychological processes relevant to groups in people's typical environment.

The benefits of representative stimuli are known (Brunswik, 1947; Wells & Windschitl, 1999), but have only recently been applied to the study of social groups.[1] In particular, Koch and colleagues (Koch, Imhoff, Dotsch, Unkelbach, & Alves, 2016) developed techniques to identify representative samples of well-known social groups. In the typical case, participants generate a list of social groups in their country, which are used as stimuli in the main study. The task is purposefully ambiguous without any group primes or examples, resulting in a list of groups that are commonly studied (e.g., Blacks, Gays), but also some not commonly studied (e.g., Athletes, Nerds, Hipsters; see Figure 1) by psychologists (see Koch et al., 2016 for details). Other methods

[1] There are calls for representative stimuli in political psychology more broadly (Baron & Jost, in press; Brandt & Wagemans, 2017; Kessler et al., 2015).

could identify groups important in other domains, such as intimacy groups (e.g., family, friends) or task groups (e.g., coworkers; Lickel et al., 2000), or groups relevant in daily life via experience sampling.[2]

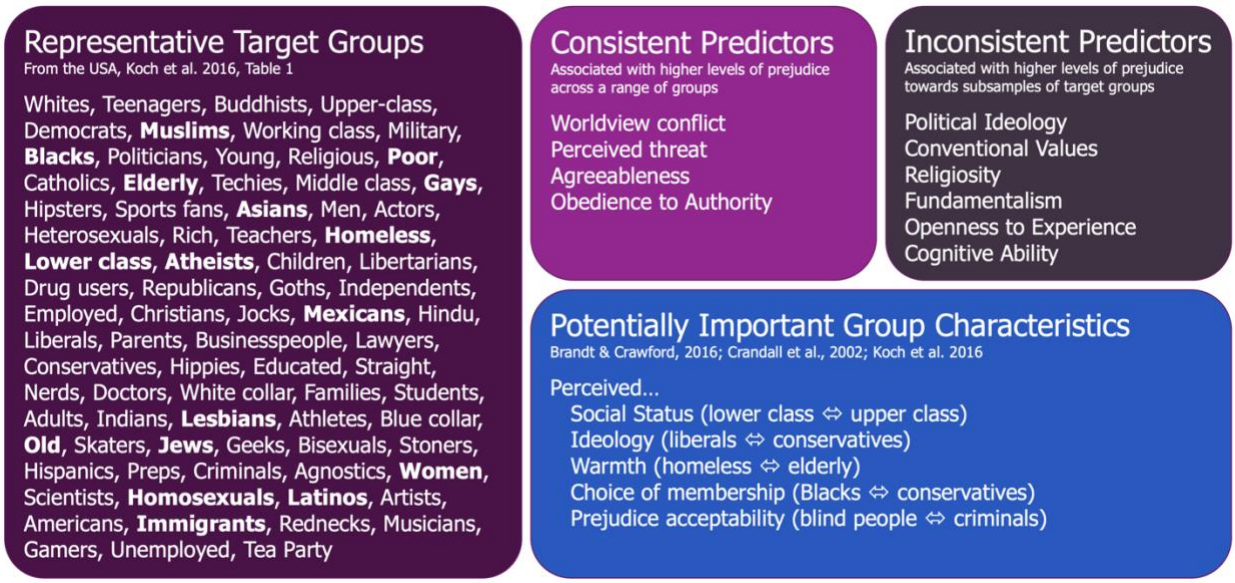

Figure 1. Representative Target Groups generated by Koch et al (2016, Table 1). Groups with bolded names are more often found in social psychology research. Consistent Predictors are associated with higher levels of prejudice across a range of groups. Inconsistent Predictors are associated with higher levels of prejudice towards subsamples of target groups. Potentially Important Group Characteristics are perceived characteristics of target groups that can be used to help understand when and why some inconsistent predictors are associated with prejudice instead of tolerance. The groups in parentheses are prototypical groups near the ends of each of the group characteristic continua.

The Findings

We use heterogeneous and representative samples of groups to understand predictors of prejudice. For organizational purposes, we chunk these predictors into constructs that consistently predict prejudice across a wide array of groups (consistent predictors) and constructs that only predict prejudice for some types of groups (inconsistent predictors).

[2] Thanks to Reviewers 1 and 2 for these suggestions.

Consistent Predictors of Prejudice

We find evidence for at least four consistent predictors of prejudice—that is, characteristics of the target or perceiver that seem to predict prejudice consistently toward a variety of groups (Figure 1 and Figure 2A). The first consistent predictor we identified is worldview conflict, which is typically measured by asking people how much they see the targets as holding different beliefs or values from their own (e.g., Brandt et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2017; Wetherell, Brandt & Reyna, 2013). These perceptions are strongly associated with prejudice towards a wide range of target groups (Brandt et al., 2015; Crawford et al., 2017; Voekel, Brandt, & Colombo, 2018). This effect is so consistent that it holds for people both high and low in Openness to Experience (Brandt et al., 2015) and puncturing the illusion of explanatory depth about people's own worldviews does not reduce it (Voekel et al., 2018).

Perceived threats, in terms of safety or resource competition, from the target is another consistent predictor of prejudice. Some perspectives (e.g., Jost et al., 2017) suggest that conservatism is especially tied to threat perceptions. However, our findings show that perceived threat from a group predicts prejudice among liberals and conservatives, as well as among religious fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists, when using a variety of prejudice measures (e.g., feeling thermometers; social distance ratings; political intolerance; Brandt & Van Tongeren, 2017; Crawford, 2014). That said, there are sometimes ideological differences in the potency of different types of threats. For example, Crawford (2014) found liberals' intolerance is driven more by perceived threats to rights, whereas conservatives' intolerance is driven more by threats to physical safety.

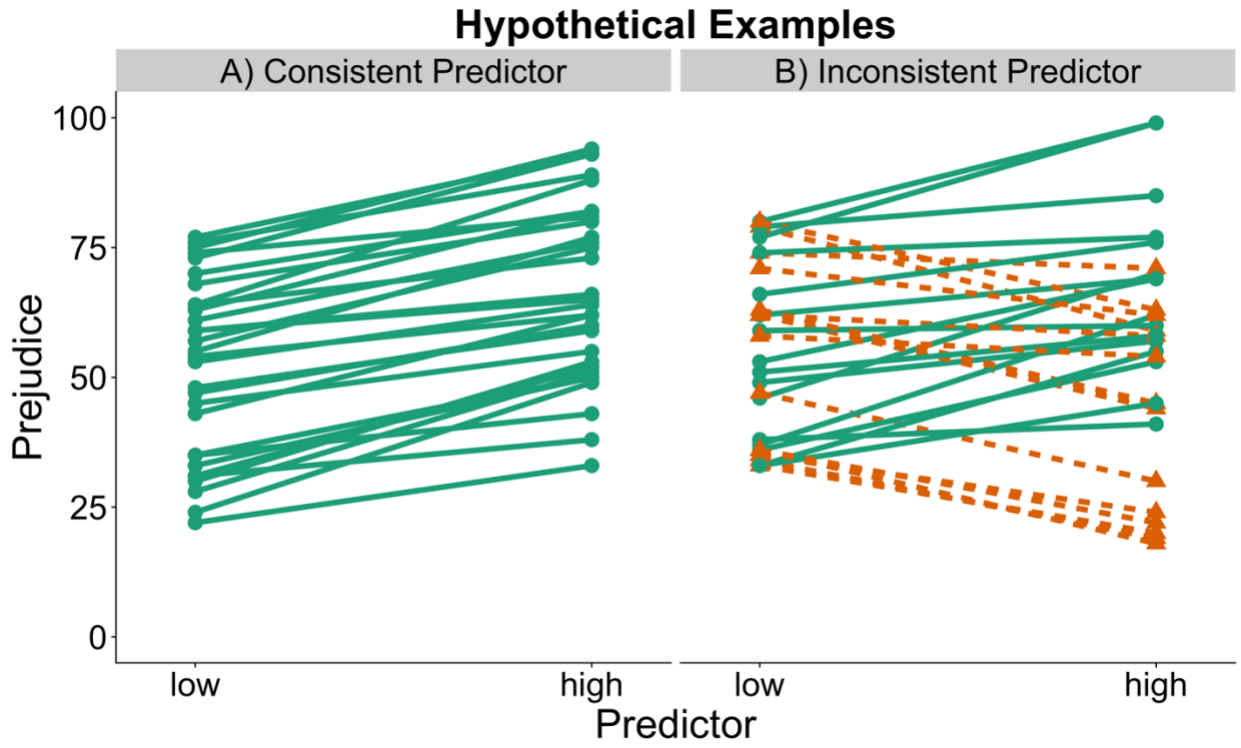

Figure 2. In both panels, each of the 30 lines represent the hypothetical relationship between a hypothetical predictor (x-axis) and prejudice towards a hypothetical target group in a single hypothetical study. A) Consistent predictors of prejudice are associated with higher levels of prejudice across many target groups. Although the exact size of the relationship might differ, the effects all tend to be positive. B) Inconsistent predictors of prejudice are associated with higher levels of prejudice for some target groups and lower levels of prejudice for other target groups. Sizes of these relationships will also vary. Perceived target group characteristics can be used to explain the variation in the size and direction of these associations.

Worldview conflict and threat are perceivers' perceptions of the target, and so combine information about the target with the perceiver's own perceptions and biases. There appear to be at least two additional consistent predictors of prejudice that are inherent to the perceiver. First, low scores on the Big Five trait Agreeableness predict prejudice against an assortment of groups, even after controlling for other Big Five traits (Crawford & Brandt, in press), perhaps because people low in Agreeable are less attuned to prejudice-suppressing norms (Graziano et al., 2007). Initial findings suggest that this is not an effect of overall negativity; low Agreeableness was not associated with negative evaluations of non-humans (e.g., robots nor frogs). Second, traits associated with obedience to authority predict political intolerance (but not prejudice per se)

towards a range of activist groups on both the political left and right (Crawford, Mallinas, & Furman, 2015).

Notably, the findings for both of these traits push against conventional wisdom in the field. Whereas existing work shows that low Agreeableness is associated with prejudice against low status groups (e.g., Sibley & Duckitt, 2008), our work using representative groups shows that this extends to high status groups. Whereas existing work shows that obedience to authority predicts prejudice towards low status and liberal groups (e.g., Altemeyer, 1998), our work using a variety of activist groups show that this is also pernicious for high status and conservative activist groups. These investigations are recent, and the question of what other (if any) traits or target characteristics predict prejudice against heterogeneous target groups remains low-hanging fruit for future research.

Inconsistent Predictors of Prejudice

Although some factors (like those described above) are associated with prejudice towards a range of groups, many factors are only associated with prejudice towards targets groups with particular characteristics (Figure 1 and Figure 2B). They are not associated with prejudice in general and are instead associated with prejudice towards specific types of groups (e.g., liberals, conservatives, high status groups). For these inconsistent predictors of prejudice, characteristics of the target group may turn off or even reverse the relationship between the predictor and prejudice (Figure 1).

Our most studied example examined the association between political ideology (sometimes called ideological identification) and prejudice. Prior work suggests that political conservatives and people with more traditional worldviews express more prejudice than liberals and people with more progressive worldviews (e.g., Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). However, using

heterogeneous target groups, we found that the relationship between conservatism and prejudice reversed depending on the perceived ideology of the target group (see Brandt et al., 2014 for an initial review). These findings have been extended to different dimensions of political ideology (i.e., social and economic; Crawford et al., 2017; Czarnek, Szwed, & Kossowska, in press), ideological worldviews (i.e., right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation; Crawford et al., 2015), and religious fundamentalism (Brandt & Van Tongeren, 2017; Kossowska, Czernatowicz-Kukuczka, & Sekerdej, 2017), and hold when using representative target groups (Brandt, 2017). In each case, those on the political left express prejudice towards those perceived to be on the political right and those on the political right express prejudice towards those perceived to be on the political left. This is because people experience worldview conflict and various threats from ideology outgroups. And these results hold when controlling for other group characteristics, such as perceived social status or choice of being a member of the group (Brandt, 2017).[3]

Existing prejudice models did not anticipate that political liberals and conservatives both express similar levels of prejudice towards different groups. This is because low Openness and cognitive ability are associated with prejudice, and political liberals report being more Open to Experiences and have higher levels of cognitive ability than political conservatives (e.g., Onraet et al., 2015; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). However, we find that Openness to Experience and cognitive ability do not make one immune: Openness and cognitive ability are both associated with prejudice against socially conventional groups (Brandt et al., 2015; Brandt & Crawford, 2016). People with low levels of cognitive ability also tend to express more prejudice against groups where group membership is not perceived to be the group member's choice (e.g., ethnic

[3] When it comes to empathy, rather than prejudice, status may play more of a role (Lucas & Kteily, 2018).

groups vs. religious groups; Brandt & Crawford, 2016). None of these findings suggest that previous research was incorrect, but that it was incomplete. When more groups are included, a more complete picture emerges.

Extensions & Future Directions

Heterogeneous target groups also help us investigate other research questions and domains. Using a heterogeneous array of groups has elucidated how political extremism is associated with prejudice and negative emotions (Van Prooijen et al., 2015), when liberals or conservatives are likely to respect authority (Frimer, Gaucher, & Schaefer, 2014), and the extent partisans categorize political reality into simpler and homogenous categories (Lammers et al., 2017). One possible area of inquiry is the negative consequences of perceived prejudice on well-being for people from a variety of groups (e.g., Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009). It may be that some groups (e.g., high status groups) are less affected by perceived prejudice because of the other social and financial resources they can draw on. Such findings would challenge narratives and beliefs of majority group victimization (cf. Norton & Sommers, 2011).

Prejudice is typically associated with preserving the status quo and maintaining intergroup inequality (e.g., support for racist and sexist policies). Studying prejudice towards a heterogeneous sample of groups highlights that prejudices towards some groups could also serve as motivation for social change. Just as prejudice towards low status groups discourages support for policies redressing inequality, prejudice towards high status groups may inspire support for economically redistributive or reparative social justice policies. Although a politics underpinned by prejudices may be corrosive overall, using heterogeneous target groups makes it possible to understand prejudice as both an agent of support for the status quo and an agent for social change.

Recommended Readings

Koch, A., Imhoff, R., Dotsch, R., Unkelbach, C., & Alves, H. (2016). The ABC of stereotypes about groups: Agency/socioeconomic success, conservative–progressive beliefs, and communion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *110*(5), 675.

(An empirical paper using representative samples of groups to map consensus group stereotypes)

Brandt, M. J. (2017). Predicting ideological prejudice. *Psychological Science, 28,* 712-722.

(An empirical paper using representative samples of groups to develop and test a predictive model of ideological prejudice)

Crawford, J. T., Brandt, M. J., Inbar, Y., Chambers, J. R., & Motyl, M. (2017). Social and economic ideologies differentially predict prejudice across the political spectrum, but social issues are most divisive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112,* 383-412.

(An empirical paper using heterogeneous samples of groups to identify differences and similarities in how economic and social political ideologies are associated with prejudice)

Fiedler, K. (2011). Voodoo correlations are everywhere—not only in neuroscience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 6*, 163–171.

(A commentary highlighting how experimental design choices, including the choice of stimuli, can inflate effect sizes and bias results)

References

Altemeyer, B. (1998). The other "authoritarian personality". In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 30, pp. 47-92). Academic Press.

Baron, J., & Jost, J. T. (in press). False equivalence: Are liberals and conservatives in the US equally "biased?" *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

Bergh, R., Akrami, N., Sidanius, J., & Sibley, C. G. (2016). Is group membership necessary for understanding generalized prejudice? A re-evaluation of why prejudices are interrelated. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *111*(3), 367.

Brandt, M. J. (2017). Predicting ideological prejudice. *Psychological Science, 28*, 712-722.

Brandt, M. J., Reyna, C., Chambers, J., Crawford, J., & Wetherell, G. (2014). The ideological-conflict hypothesis: Intolerance among both liberals and conservatives. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 23*, 27-34.

Brandt, M. J., Chambers, J. R., Crawford, J. T., Wetherell, G., & Reyna, C. (2015). Bounded openness: The effect of openness to experience on intolerance is moderated by target group conventionality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*, 549-568.

Brandt, M. J., & Crawford, J. T. (2016). Answering unresolved questions about the relationship between cognitive ability and prejudice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 7*, 884-892.

Brandt, M. J. & van Tongeren, D. R. (2017). People both high and low on religious fundamentalism are prejudiced towards dissimilar groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112*, 76-97.

Brandt, M. J., & Wagemans, F. M. A. (2017). From the political here and now to generalizable knowledge. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 3*, 317-320.

Brunswik, E. (1956). Perception and the representative design of psychological experiments. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press

Craig, M. A., & Richeson, J. A. (2014). More diverse yet less tolerant? How the increasingly diverse racial landscape affects white Americans' racial attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *40*(6), 750-761.

Crandall, C. S., Eshleman, A., & O'Brien, L. (2002). Social norms and the expression and suppression of prejudice: The struggle for internalization. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82, 359 –378.

Crawford, J. T. (2014). Ideological symmetries and asymmetries in political intolerance and prejudice toward political activist groups. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 55*, 284-298.

Crawford, J., & Brandt, M. J. (in press). Big Five traits and inclusive generalized prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/6vqwk

Crawford, J. T., Brandt, M. J., Inbar, Y., Chambers, J. R., & Motyl, M. (2017). Social and economic ideologies differently predict prejudice across the political spectrum, but social issues are most divisive. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 112,* 383-412.

Crawford, J. T., Mallinas, S. R., & Furman, B. J. (2015). The balanced ideological antipathy model: Explaining the effects of ideological attitudes on intergroup antipathy across the political spectrum. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*, 1607-1622.

Czarnek, G., Szwed, P., & Kossowska, M. (in press). Right-and left-wing prejudice toward dissimilar groups in cultural and economic domains. *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

Frimer, J. A., Gaucher, D., & Schaefer, N. K. (2014). Political conservatives' affinity for obedience to authority is loyal, not blind. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *40*(9), 1205-1214.

Graziano, W. G., Bruce, J., Sheese, B. E., & Tobin, R. M. (2007). Attraction, personality, and prejudice: Liking none of the people most of the time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *93*(4), 565.

Greitemeyer, T. (2014). Playing violent video games increases intergroup bias. *Personality and social psychology bulletin*, *40*(1), 70-78.

Judd, C. M., Westfall, J., & Kenny, D. A. (2012). Treating stimuli as a random factor in social psychology: A new and comprehensive solution to a pervasive but largely ignored problem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *103*(1), 54-69.

Jost, J. T., Stern, C., Rule, N. O., & Sterling, J. (2017). The politics of fear: Is there an ideological asymmetry in existential motivation? *Social cognition*, *35*(4), 324-353.

Kessler, T., Proch, J., Hechler, S., & Nägler, L. A. (2015). Political diversity versus stimuli diversity: Alternative ways to improve social psychological science. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *38*.

Koch, A., Imhoff, R., Dotsch, R., Unkelbach, C., & Alves, H. (2016). The ABC of stereotypes about groups: Agency/socioeconomic success, conservative–progressive beliefs, and communion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *110*(5), 675.

Kossowska, M., Czernatowicz-Kukuczka, A., & Sekerdej, M. (2017). Many faces of dogmatism: Prejudice as a way of protecting certainty against value violators among dogmatic believers and atheists. *British Journal of Psychology*, *108*(1), 127-147.

Krosch, A. R., Tyler, T. R., & Amodio, D. M. (2017). Race and recession: Effects of economic scarcity on racial discrimination. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *113*(6), 892.

Lammers, J., Koch, A., Conway, P., & Brandt, M. J. (2017). The political domain appears simpler to the politically extreme than to political moderates. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *8*(6), 612-622.

Lickel, B., Hamilton, D. L., Wieczorkowska, G., Lewis, A., Sherman, S. J., & Uhles, A. N. (2000). Varieties of groups and the perception of group entitativity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*(2), 223-246.

Lucas, B. J., & Kteily, N. S. (2018). (Anti-) egalitarianism differentially predicts empathy for members of advantaged versus disadvantaged groups. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *114*(5), 665.

McFarland, S. (2010). Authoritarianism, social dominance, and other roots of generalized prejudice. *Political Psychology*, *31*(3), 453-477.

Munafò, M. R., Nosek, B. A., Bishop, D. V., Button, K. S., Chambers, C. D., Du Sert, N. P., ... & Ioannidis, J. P. (2017). A manifesto for reproducible science. *Nature Human Behaviour*, *1*, 0021.

Norton, M. I., & Sommers, S. R. (2011). Whites see racism as a zero-sum game that they are now losing. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *6*(3), 215-218.

Onraet, E., Van Hiel, A., Dhont, K., Hodson, G., Schittekatte, M., & De Pauw, S. (2015). The association of cognitive ability with right-wing ideological attitudes and prejudice: A meta-analytic review. *European Journal of Personality*, *29*(6), 599-621.

Pascoe, E. A., & Smart Richman, L. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: a meta-analytic review. *Psychological bulletin*, *135*(4), 531.

Sibley, C. G., & Duckitt, J. (2008). Personality and prejudice: A meta-analysis and theoretical review. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *12*(3), 248-279.

Quirin, M., Bode, R. C., Luckey, U., Pyszczynski, T., & Kuhl, J. (2014). Profound versus superficial coping with mortality threats: Action orientation moderates implicit but not explicit outgroup prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *40*(9), 1132-1147.

van Prooijen, J. W., Krouwel, A. P., Boiten, M., & Eendebak, L. (2015). Fear among the extremes: How political ideology predicts negative emotions and outgroup derogation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *41*, 485-497.

Voelkel, J. G., Brandt, M. J. & Colombo, M. (2018). I know that I know nothing: Can puncturing the illusion of explanatory depth overcome the relationship between attitudinal dissimilarity and prejudice? *Comprehensive Results in Social Psychology, 3*, 56-78.

Wells, G. L., & Windschitl, P. D. (1999). Stimulus sampling and social psychological experimentation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*, 1115-1125.

Wetherell, G. A., Brandt, M. J., & Reyna, C. (2013). Discrimination across the ideological divide: The role of value violations and abstract values in discrimination by liberals and conservatives. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *4*(6), 658-667.